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ABSTRACT

A national survey was conducted to gather information on the status of alumni programs at two-year colleges. Surveys were sent to 422 two-year institutions, requesting information on alumni program operations, formal alumni groups, priorities for alumni activities, awards programs, and fund-raising. Study findings, based on responses from 166 institutions, included the following: (1) 92 colleges reported having an alumni program, and another 49 planned to initiate one; (2) "public relations" was selected as the primary purpose in operating alumni programs by most colleges, followed by "fund-raising" and "identifying a pool of volunteers"; (3) membership dues funded the alumni programs at 46 colleges, while 41 programs were financed by departmental budgets; (4) though only 8 colleges had a full-time person responsible for the program, most programs were staffed by part-time paid employees rather than by volunteers; (5) 78 colleges had formal alumni organizations with a constitution and by-laws; (6) 43 of the 65 respondents providing a definition considered alumni as "anyone who has taken one regular academic, vocational/technical or continuing education/community service course" at the college; (7) the activities assigned highest priority were newsletters sent to all alumni of record, annual meetings, social events, and functions for alumni held prior to regular college events; and (8) less than half of the respondents were involved in activities to raise funds from alumni. Suggestions, warnings, and admonishments to those interested in beginning alumni programs are provided. (MDB)

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TWO-YEAR COLLEGE ALUMNI PROGRAMS: PRACTICES AND POSSIBILITIES

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TWO-YEAR COLLEGE ALUMNI PROGRAMS: PRACTICES AND POSSIBILITIES

This report presents a summary of findings of recent research concerning the status of two-year college alumni programs.

The Junior and Community College Institute, working with Mr. Richard Witter, and Florida State University's State and Regional Higher Education Center, joined together in 1987 to conduct a national study of two-year college alumni programs.

Researchers sent surveys to 422 institutions, selected from the membership list of The National Council for Resource Development (NCRD), an affiliate council of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. They tabulated data from 166 responses and reviewed accompanying documents, (i.e., constitutions and by-laws, newsletters, magazines, etc.).

Note: Colleges which responded no to the questions "Does your college have an alumni program?" and "Does your college plan to initiate an alumni program?" did not, in most cases, answer further questions in the survey. The number of respondents, therefore, to subsequent questions was less than the total number of responses (166).

Demographic Information

The majority of respondents (64 of 101) had full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments of 0-4,999. Nineteen had FTE enrollments between 5,000-9,999, 16 between 10,000-20,000 or more. The sample represented more suburban (38) and rural (27) than urban locations. Just 7 inner city schools responded to the survey; 21 urban (not inner city) schools did. A preponderance of single (55) over multi-campus (37) institutions returned surveys. Over half of the responses were from institutions founded since 1960.

Alumni Program Status

Of 163 responses to the question, "Does your college have an alumni program?," 92 reported they do. Forty-nine colleges said they do not now have a program but plan to initiate one; 37 plan to do so in the next one to two years. Only 30 respondents said they did not plan to initiate an alumni program. Most colleges (58 of 84) with alumni programs started them between 1980-87.

Finding/Conclusion:

It is clear that many, many colleges have recently established alumni programs, and that many more colleges plan to develop them soon. Colleges increasingly see their alumni as valuable resources.

Respondents to this section of the survey show that they have fewer alumni on their active mailing list than they estimate to be their total number of alumni. This suggests that while some colleges have an idea how many alumni they have, they have not yet identified or "found" them to add their names to a mailing list. Organizing a complete and accurate mailing list is an obvious yet critical first step in alumni program development.

Alumni Program Operations

When asked to rank their reasons for operating an alumni program, the majority selected "public relations as an adjunct to other motivation" or "strictly public relations" as the first priorities. The next priority, fund-raising, was followed by identifying a pool of volunteers.

Thirty-six of 117 respondents to the question, "Where is the program located within the institution?," reported the alumni function to be located within the Development Office. Twenty-four responses showed it to be located in the Student Services area, and 17 in the Public Relations area.

In response to the question "How is the alumni program funded?," 46 said through membership dues, 41 through departmental budgets, and 31 through revenue from special events. With this question, people were given a list of potential funding sources, and asked to check all that apply.

Only 8 respondents indicated that they have a full-time person responsible for the alumni program. The majority of respondents (64 of 80) showed that the time devoted to alumni programs was 35% or less; 36 indicated it was 10% or less. The title of the person responsible for alumni programs varied considerably.

Findings/Conclusions:

Of interest is the fact that while the primary purpose of establishing alumni programs was described as "public relations" or "public relations as an adjunct to other motivation," the alumni office at many institutions is located in the Development Office. This is not incongruous, however, since we know that at many two-year colleges, particularly smaller ones in rural or suburban areas as those responding to this survey, may have more than one function within the Development Office. Indeed, the Development Office at such institutions may be one which includes other "Institutional Advancement" activities, i.e., public relations, private fund-raising, alumni efforts, grants, etc.

Public relations seems an appropriate first priority for new alumni programs. Since many two-year colleges have not maintained contact with their alumni over the years, it is important to renew acquaintance with alumni before soliciting them in fund-raising

campaigns. While fund-raising may be a second priority of alumni programs, by-passing the first step of public relations and communication could prove fatal to fund-raising efforts. Colleges can get alumni involved in all types of activities. Indeed, some suggest that alumni need to be involved in things other than development well before any broad fund-raising efforts are undertaken.

Increasingly, colleges are assigning the job of alumni development to one individual. While at two-year schools this often means staff time of less than 100%, it is clear that colleges <u>are</u> using staff rather than volunteers.

With respect to funding, survey data suggest several avenues for funding of alumni programs. As with other college activities, alumni programs need top-level administrative support, frequently evidenced through departmental budgets. Without top-level administrative and budget support, chances of long-term success are diminished.

<u>Alumni Groups</u>

The majority (78 of 96) of survey respondents indicated that their college has a formal alumni organization with a constitution and by-laws. Most of these organizations include all persons defined as alumni. Forty-three of 65 respondents define alumni as "anyone who has taken one regular academic, vocational/technical or continuing education/community service course." Twenty of 51 respondents have membership dues of up to $20 a year. Most organizations have approximately four elected officers and four standing committees. The members of the governing board ranged in number from 1 to 30; most had 7 to 15 members. Sixty-six respondents said these boards meet regularly; 72 have newsletters. And, only 28 indicated they have students currently involved in alumni efforts. Most multi-campus institutions do not have separate alumni organizations for each campus. Most colleges which do not have a formal alumni organization do not charge a fee for remaining on an alumni list. About half of the respondents have, half do not have, special interest or academic/vocational alumni groups. These groups are organized in a variety of ways, by the "director" of alumni programs, by faculty advisor of a club or major, volunteers, etc.

<u>Findings/Conclusions</u>:

Most formal alumni organizations include all persons defined as alumni, not necessarily just dues-paying members. And, as noted above, the definition of alumni at most colleges is a broad one. Membership dues reported through the survey are minimal. It seems impossible for two-year college alumni organizations to be self-supporting through membership dues alone.

As cited above, 72 respondents indicated a characteristic of their alumni organization to be a newsletter. This would support public relations as a primary purpose of these relatively new alumni associations.

One frequently hears that some of the principles for alumni development at four-year colleges, such as athletic clubs, support to sororities or classes, and the camaraderie established in a residential setting, may not be successful at some two-year colleges. Alumni groupings at two-year colleges are frequently, as data in this survey show, based by discipline and program rather than by class.

Alumni Activities

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to assign the top five priorities for alumni activities, indicating the most valuable/important. The top four activities selected in the order of value of importance were: 1) alumni newsletter or magazine sent to all alumni of record; 2) annual meeting of an alumni organization; 3) social events for all alumni; and 4) pre-functions to college-sponsored events. Many other alumni activities, i.e., travel programs, dinner theater events, career advisement services, homecoming events, etc., were listed. Few except the four noted above received a significant enough number of responses to show them as particularly valuable/important.

Respondents were also asked the question, "Do you have alumni serving on curriculum advisory committees?" Approximately half of the respondents have, half do not have alumni on these committees.

Findings/Conclusions:

Again, we see that an alumni newsletter is important for two-year college alumni programs. It supports respondents' public relations priority. Having alumni on curriculum advisory committees seems an excellent way to tap the wisdom of former students. Those colleges which have chosen to ask alumni to serve on curriculum advisory committees appear to have made a prudent choice.

Awards Programs

The only two awards programs that received significant response in the survey were Student Scholarships and Outstanding Alumni Award. Nineteen respondents indicated that they have student scholarship awards which range from $200-$600. Thirty-five reported award plaques given to outstanding alumni.

Fund-Raising

Respondents were asked to provide information concerning

direct-mail, phonathons, planned giving, special events, and the use of volunteers in fund-raising. Less than half reported they are involved in such fund-raising efforts with alumni.
Thirty-seven respondents had conducted a direct-mail fund-raising campaign with alumni; 31 had conducted a phonathon. The majority indicated that such fund-raising efforts are relatively new. Most indicated that the direct-mail and phonathon campaigns had been done for just one year. With respect to planned giving, 55 responded they do not "promote planned giving (wills, bequests, charitable trusts, gifts of life insurance and real estate, pooled income fund, etc.) in any way at their college." Just 20 indicated they focus any of their promotion on alumni. Just 36 respondents conduct special events to raise money for the alumni organization and/or the college. Further, only 32 said they use alumni as volunteer solicitors in their fund-raising programs.

Findings/Conclusions:

The survey data indicate that private fund-raising efforts such as annual direct-mail campaigns, phonathons, special events, or planned giving programs are fairly new for two-year colleges as they raise funds with alumni. Clearly, colleges are just beginning their fund-raising efforts with alumni. As two-year colleges begin to develop more private fund-raising programs, their need for a potential donor base for annual campaigns, phonathons and planned giving programs increases. Alumni can be a source of such broad-based support and a volunteer pool. As suggested earlier, alumni can provide support to the college in a variety of ways. Again, colleges need to get alumni involved in things other than fund-raising and development before any broad fund-raising and development efforts are undertaken.

This approach to working with alumni corresponds with the 3-W approach to working with volunteers advocated by George A. Brakely, Jr. in his book Tested Ways to Successful Fund-Raising. Brakely speaks of seeing volunteers for their Wisdom, Work, and Wealth. While wealth should, of course, not be ignored, neither should it be the first priority. Indeed, Brakely suggests that it be the last.

Many colleges make the mistake of establishing and thinking of their alumni program primarily as a means for fund-raising. This can frequently backfire, as alumni are not likely to consider giving to an organization from which they haven't heard in 20 years or about which they know nothing. Establishing fund-raising as the primary goal for an alumni program early in its development is not considered wise.

General Comments:

When asked to respond to open-ended questions concerning special considerations for two-year college programs, successes, failures,

and advice to beginners, respondents were generous in their information. What follows highlights some of the respondents' thoughts about these issues.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Special Considerations for Two-Year College Alumni Programs

1. Those who transfer to 4 year colleges can transfer their allegiance.
2. Friend-raising, not just fund-raising, is important.
3. No residence halls or traditional collegial activities (i.e., athletics, sororities) affect the structure of two-year college alumni programs.
4. Two-year alumni do not have "year of graduation" orientation.
5. Commitment and considering alumni as a long term investment are keys to success.

Shared Successes

1. A strong, dedicated, enthusiastic board is important.
2. Good records are a must.
3. Family oriented events are often successful.
4. Planning sessions held to define goals, objectives and direction are useful.
5. Find out what alumni want to do.
6. Involve as many people as possible and practical.
7. Group alumni by program not year. Strong core groups are necessary.

Warnings about Failures

1. Be prepared to provide resources on a continuing basis. There must be adequate secretarial staff for updating records, etc.
2. Failure often occurs because of no follow through.
3. Don't attempt social event/fund raising until base support is in place.
4. Keep board members and volunteers active.
5. Ultimate success will rest on a dedicated alumni office.
6. Not keeping momentum can prove fatal.
7. Take your time.

Advice to Beginners from Peers

1. Do it.
2. Find an outstanding former student to be active in the association.
3. Start a data base as soon as possible. Keep it up to date.
4. Get top level support.
5. Chart short and long-term goals.
6. Do not assess dues.

7. Make an investment of budgetary support and give it five years to bring a return.
8. Go slowly. Have patience. Whatever is done should be well done and in good taste.
9. Active committed steering group is essential.
10. HAVE FUN!!

CONCLUSIONS

As two-year colleges continue to develop alumni programs, they would be wise to consider many of the things that their peers have suggested in this survey.

An important thing to remember is that alumni programs are not an end unto themselves. Colleges must determine their reason for establishing them, and realize they can work with alumni in many ways. Both long and short-term goals must be defined for the alumni association.

Alumni program development, as with most any new effort in an organization, requires long-term investment. College administrators must understand this and not expect immediate results.

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